



# A Tradition of Health in all Utah Schools

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the Gold Medal Schools Team of the Utah Department of Health, I am pleased to provide additional clarification regarding the GMS criteria regarding scheduling of school meals.

The recommendation to provide an adequate amount of time for students to eat school meals and to schedule lunch periods at reasonable hours around midday was addressed by former Surgeon General David Satcher, in *The Surgeon General's Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*, in 2001, a report that indicated an urgent need to address the epidemic of overweight and obesity in our nation's children, particularly in the school environment. This recommendation is also one of the 12 Commitments to Change resulting from the 2002 Healthy Schools Summit, which guides Action for Healthy Kids. The specific recommendation that defines an adequate amount of time to eat as at least 10 minutes after sitting down for breakfast and at least 20 minutes for lunch (once seated) has been published in a number of significant documents, including USDA TEAM Nutrition's *Changing the Scene: Improving the School Nutrition Environment*; The National Association of State Boards of Education's *Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn: A School Health Policy Guide*; The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *School Health Index*; The National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity's *Model Local School Wellness Policies*; and Action for Healthy Kids' *Recommendations for Nutrition Policies in Utah Schools*.

The importance of good nutrition is well stated in the Commitment to Change document:

Healthy schools – those that support good nutrition and physical activity as part of a total learning environment – produce healthy students. Healthy students are better able to develop and learn. Healthy students who achieve their educational potential form healthy communities. Healthy communities build a healthy America. The underlying premise of the Healthy Schools Summit and Action for Healthy Kids is that all schools in America should provide a healthy environment where children learn and participate in positive dietary and lifestyle behaviors and practices.

I refer you also to *The Learning Connection: The Value of Improving Nutrition and Physical Activity in Our Schools*, which clearly documents how the excessive rise in poor nutrition, inactivity and weight problems adversely affect academic achievement and possible cost schools millions of dollars each year.

The school nutrition environment has a powerful influence on behavior. I learned this firsthand when my first-grader did not eat lunch for several months because he was unaccustomed to the stimulating environment and he wanted to go out and play. His teacher was very concerned that he was so tired in the afternoon. Children are likely to enjoy their food more, may eat a better variety, and may try more healthy options if they can relax and socialize without feeling rushed.

Scheduling adequate time for lunch (at least 20 minutes), at an appropriate time of day when children are hungry but not overly so (between 11:00 and 1:00), and scheduling recess after lunch will result in improved child nutrition, behavior, and learning.

I applaud the Gold Medal Schools program for their commitment to providing school environments that promote and protect children's health. I believe these criteria are evidence-based and reflect current best practices for optimal school nutrition environments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrice Isabella". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Patrice" written in a slightly larger, more prominent script than the last name "Isabella".

Patrice Isabella, MS, RD, CD  
Nutrition Coordinator  
Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program